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Guest columnist

Good ole boys should stay home

NEW YORK CITY — In the movies they would be heroes.

Two gun-fancying good ole boys, former helicopter pilots in Vietnam, reject the sissified comforts of civilian life and go down to Nicaragua to help the contras — the “freedom fighters” — walk tall.

Someone has to halt the rising tide of global communism, after all. It sure isn't going to be Congress, which cut off aid to the contras this spring, or American voters, who in poll after poll express the lily-livered view that we ought to leave the Sandinistas alone.

But the real-life version is not so uplifting or so simple.

Unfortunately for the would-be John Waynes who get their facts from *Soldier of Fortune* magazine, the contras are not some noble band of freedom fighters. They are brutal thugs, veterans, for the most part, of

deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza's hated National Guard — the same sort of people who make up the death squads of El Salvador.

Their war, moreover, is not against a shadowy army of international communists. It is against the civilian population of their own country.

When I visited Nicaragua this summer, I saw for myself what the contras are doing. I met peasants near the town of Jinotega whose homes and crops had been destroyed in contra raids.

In the town of Pantasma, 25 miles from the Honduran border, I met women whose unarmed husbands and sons had been massacred, and who had then been forced to walk past the corpses while the contras mocked their grief.

Everywhere, I met people

Katha Pollitt recently visited Nicaragua as part of a delegation of writers and artists hosted by the Sandinista Cultural Workers Association.

who spoke sadly of the schools, day care centers, clinics, and roads that the Sandinistas had built and the contras had destroyed.

The Sandinistas may not be most Americans' idea of the perfect government. But they have wide popular support and the contras, not surprisingly, have next to none.

Recognizing this reality, Congress seems willing, for the moment, to let the Nicaraguans work out their own destiny. Private citizens — not to mention the CIA, which may well prove to be behind this shameful incident — ought to do the same.